



1 An Introduction to Political Life

Chapter Outline

- Politics as a Vocation
- Politics and the Management of Power and Conflict
- Power
- The State
 - Theoretical Approaches to Understanding the Role of the State
 - Pluralism Approach
 - Class Analysis Approach
 - Feminism Approach
 - Postmodernism Approach
- Government
- Democracy
 - Direct Democracy and Representative Democracy
 - Measuring Democracy
 - Who Gets Heard and Why?
 - Is Democracy a Process or an Outcome?
 - Defining Democracy
- Summary

Learning Objectives

After reading Chapter 1 in *Canadian Democracy*, you should be able to do the following:

- Identify some different meanings of politics and explain which is most useful.
- Explain the differences between power, influence, coercion, and authority.
- Discuss the importance of legitimacy and consent in democracies.
- Distinguish “state” from “government” and explain why the distinction between these two terms is important.
- Identify the characteristics generally associated with democratic government and discuss some of the contradictions among these characteristics.
- Compose one or two paragraphs that use as many key concepts (listed below) as possible.

Key Concepts

Authority The recognition by the compliant party that the person or organization issuing a command has the right to do so and should be obeyed (p. 7)

Class analysis An approach that sees the state in capitalist societies as an instrument through which small minorities control most of society’s wealth to maintain their social and economic dominance (p. 11)

Coercion Threat or use of force (p. 7)

Cultural hegemony The ability of society’s dominant class to have its values and beliefs accepted as the conventional wisdom in society at large (p. 16)

Democracy A political system based on the formal political equality of all citizens, in which there is a realistic possibility that voters can replace the government, and in which certain basic rights and freedoms are protected (p. 25)

Direct democracy Government of the citizens by the citizens (p. 19)

Feminism A theoretical approach that sees the state as an inherently patriarchal institution, where politics are not neutral or gender-free (p. 11)

Government The organization of the state and the system of institutions and agencies used to exercise its authority (p. 12)

Influence The ability of A to convince B that a particular action is reasonable or otherwise in B’s best interests (p. 7)

Legitimacy The rules and institutions that constitute the state, and which determine how governments are chosen, are accepted by most people as being reasonable (p. 12)

Majoritarianism The belief that the opinion of the majority should almost always be considered in decision making (p. 22)

Pluralism The understanding of politics as fundamentally a competition between different interests (p. 11)

Politics The activity by which rival claims are settled by public authorities (p. 5)

Postmodernism A theoretical approach that sees the state as an essentially oppressive and even repressive institution (p. 12)

Power The ability to influence what happens (p. 7)

Private realm The areas of life where the state's authority does not extend (p. 5)

Public agenda The matters that have been identified by opinion leaders in the media and in government as ones that warrant some policy response (p. 23)

Public realm The sphere of what is considered to be political; its boundary is located at the limits of the state's authority (p. 5)

Referendum Direct vote of citizens on an important public question (p.20)

Representative democracy Government is carried out by elected legislatures that represent the people (p. 20)

Resources Things we need for survival or desire for comfort (p.5)

Rule of law No public official has the legitimate right to exercise any powers other than those assigned to his or her office by the law (pp. 21)

Social capital Norms of interpersonal trust, a sense of civic duty, and a belief that one's involvement in politics and in the life of the community matters (p. 18)

State A broad concept that includes government as the seat of legitimate authority in a territory but also includes bureaucracy, judiciary, the Armed Forces and internal police, structures of legislative assemblies and administration, public corporations, regulatory boards, and ideological apparatuses such as the education establishment and publicly owned media (p. 9)

Totalitarianism A system of government that suppresses all dissent in the name of some supreme goal (p. 15)

Values Personal beliefs in what is right or wrong, important or not important, valuable or not valuable (p. 5)

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Identify and contrast the three faces of power: coercion, influence, and authority.
2. Freedom House has identified a number of criteria—a democracy index—by which to determine how well countries respect and protect civil liberties. Identify and assess these criteria.
3. Review the following three approaches to the role of the state: class analysis, feminism, and postmodernism. What do they share in common, and how do they differ?

4. Identify and review the various types of political systems. How do they differ from each other and what type of political power best applies to these systems?
5. How do state and government differ from each other?

Additional Resources

Democracy Watch. <http://democracywatch.ca/>

Government of Canada. “MyDemocracy.ca”
<https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/electoral-reform/participate-in-canadian-federal-electoral-reform-consultations/mydemocracyca.html>

Library and Archives Canada. “The Canadian State: Documents and Dialogue.”
www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/canadian-state/index-e.html

Library and Archives Canada. “LAC Forum on Canadian Democracy.”
www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/democracy/index-e.html